Stay

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/21445729.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal (TV), Death Stranding (Video Games)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Clifford Unger
Characters:	Will Graham, Will Graham's Dogs, Clifford Unger
Additional Tags:	Slow Burn, Fluff, Feelings, Comfort, Tea, Tentacles, Intimacy, lovemaking, aching, Longing, long distance, (i guess??), Rimming, Hair-pulling, Tentacle Sex, But also normal sex, This is a strange story that is painful and cute, i don't make the rules
Language:	English
Collections:	MonthlyRareMeat
Stats:	Published: 2019-11-15 Updated: 2019-12-31 Words: 6,277 Chapters: 3/?

Stay

by whiskeyandspite

Summary

Will didn't ask him where he'd come from, or what he wanted. He didn't ask Cliff what he was looking for. He knew the answer, he'd been given it already, and Will had never been a sadist. No use forcing Cliff to further cement his own incomprehension to himself if it did nothing for either of them.

Inspired by and following on from lovetincture's Follow Me Home, and it went in a direction I didn't expect.

Notes

In short, I came here with the intention of having tentacle porn.
I left with 2.5k of feels.
There will be more, so help me.

- Inspired by Follow Me Home by lovetincture

Chapter 1

Will didn't sleep much, he'd never been particularly good at it. He just as comfortably moved about at night as he did during the day, taking the time to catch up on marking papers or disemboweling a boat motor. Sometimes he'd go for walks.

That was how it had started, initially. Just a walk. And on that walk, he'd found a stray.

Will enjoyed taking things in and bringing them back to life. It made him feel contented, gave him a purpose, carefully masked the darkness lurking behind the altruism. He was always kind to the strays. If they remained unclaimed, he kept the canine ones.

The others he never saw again.

No one did, really.

Out of sight, out of mind, and off the board of missing persons posters in the FBI lunchroom within a few months.

Now, Will lay awake and watched the shadows on his ceiling reenact a Kubrick film and wondered if Cliff was sleeping. There was no sound down below to suggest he'd gotten up, or that Buster had. It wasn't a fluke that he always left *that* dog to nap with the strays; Buster was an utterly fierce protector. If something was out of place, he was the first to alert.

So Will pushed himself from bed, prepared to excuse his presence downstairs as nature's call, and descended in silence.

The lump on the bed suggested a sleeping figure, and the smaller one beside suggested Buster hadn't moved. Still, Will made his way nearer, feet sock-silent over the wooden floor until he was standing over the man he'd taken in. Cliff's expression hadn't eased in sleep, he looked just as pained, just as concerned as he had when Will had handed him his whiskey.

And again, that painful urge to just reach out and touch him.

So Will did, just two fingers against his forehead, swiping aside his hair.

He pulled his hand away with a look of distaste when that tacky tar-like substance clung to his fingertips. He drew his thumb through it, tried to wipe it away and found that instead it spread; down to his first knuckle, to the second.

Will cursed and stepped back, just enough to catch the creaking floorboard.

He didn't know what *happened* , he only knew what he had felt and seen. One moment his hand was near his face, the next it was pressed almost painfully hard against the side of the bed as though stuck there, the slime crawling in cold tendrils up under his sleeve.

"What the fuck?" Will whispered.

“Were you trying to kill me, Will?” Cliff asked him quietly. When Will looked up, his eyes were open but he hadn’t even turned to look at him; just lay there as though still halfway caught in a dream.

Or perhaps Will was dreaming.

“Wariness is a strange thing,” Cliff added absently, as Will continued to pointedly try to tug his hand free. “Always alert, always aware.”

“What the fuck are you?”

“I don’t know,” Cliff replied honestly, finally turning to look at Will where he stood. A blink, and Will’s hand was free again, the oily residue just at the tips of his fingers again as he stumbled back. “I don’t remember.”

The commotion, quiet as it had been, was enough to wake Buster from his rest and he stretched out looking between the two of them before jumping off the bed to leave them to their business. Will watched him trot away with wide eyes, clutching his wrist with his other hand. He hadn’t responded. None of the dogs had. Will turned back to the man - man? - on the bed.

“Am I dreaming right now?”

“I can’t tell you that,” Cliff shrugged. “If you are, would you trust your mind to be honest?”

“I don’t trust my mind at all,” Will replied, straightening up again. He took a step nearer again, watched as Cliff kicked the blankets away and pushed himself to sit up. He looked much the same as when Will had found him, the same clothes with the same oil stains.

“You sensed me coming?”

“I didn’t.”

Will blinked, releasing his hand to look at his fingertips again. “This shit did?”

“I expect so, if it reacted to you.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know,” Cliff repeated, slower, his voice lowering in his frustration. Will could tell that if anything, the confusion was just as unwelcome to Cliff as to Will at least. No lies there. Will considered a moment and moved, quickly, to try and grab the man’s shoulder where he sat.

Swifter than anything human, than anything at all, Will’s attempt was countered; his body shoved hard to the floor with a weight on his chest that grew and grew until he was choking with it, unable to even lift his arms to try to free himself.

And then it was gone, again, blink-quick, and Cliff was sitting on the edge of the bed watching him. As Will looked, the oil spread over his skin, leaving behind the cuff of a

jacket, its sleeve, up and up until Cliff was clothed in a manner fit for the weather. And then it disappeared entirely, leaving Cliff clean and human once more, just a man sitting on Will's bed, tilting his head like one of his dogs did.

"I wouldn't try again." Cliff suggested, setting his hands to his knees and levering himself up. As he approached Will he held out a hand to help him up. After some hesitation, Will took it. When he'd balanced himself, Cliff let him go. "Thank you for your hospitality. I'll be on my way."

"Where?"

"Wherever I was going before you found me."

Will watched him, wide-eyed, as he made his way through to the kitchen, offered his hand down to the dogs to sniff before unlocking the door.

"Wait!"

Cliff turned, just enough, gently set his foot by the door to keep the dogs from running free through it.

"Where are you going to go?"

Cliff's jaw worked and for a long while he said nothing. When he left, he was careful not to let the screen door slam, and Will could only assume that the answer would have been what Cliff had said most frequently: *I don't know* .

It was raining when Will heard the dogs start up downstairs. Not unusual, a few weren't fans of stormy weather and needed to let out steam in the only way they understood how. The knock on the door had been unexpected.

Outside, leaning against the porch, was Cliff.

He looked like he'd come out of a goddamn warzone; army issue pants and boots, bullet proof vest, a helmet perched on his head with night vision goggles flicked aside so he could see properly. He looked a mess.

Will said nothing. Neither did Cliff.

Slowly, as the rain grew heavier, the vestiges of battle started to fade. His face clean of blood, eyes bright as Will had ever seen them. His uniform dried to near-new condition, his helmet and its associated hardware faded like smoke. Cliff swallowed, throat working in a deliberate motion as though that alone was hard for him, and at last cast his eyes to Will framed in the door.

"Tea?" he asked, voice a croak compared to what it had been last time. Will held open the door for him as Cliff made his way inside.

Will didn't ask him where he'd come from, or what he wanted. He didn't ask Cliff what he was looking for. He knew the answer, he'd been given it already, and Will had never been a sadist. No use forcing Cliff to further cement his own incomprehension to himself if it did nothing for either of them.

Will poured the whiskey, they took it to the bed. Winston, this time, volunteered to hang out with the strange man who'd shown up on his porch, nosing against Cliff's clothes, under his chin, before delivering one gentle lick to his face and settling down beside him. Neither spoke. Neither felt they needed to. When Will stood to go, Cliff caught his hand again and this time Will didn't pull free. He just stood there, allowed himself to be held, before turning his wrist in Cliff's hold, squeezing his arm, and stepping away.

In the night, no dogs made a fuss, and Will didn't disturb his strange and wayward visitor, and in the morning, along with the rain, Cliff was gone again.

There was no set schedule for his appearance. Cliff could show up once every few weeks or once every few months. After a while, Will started leaving a spare key under the mat for him to use, if he manifested himself on the road and Will was away and unable to let him in.

It felt almost like a long distance relationship, if a relationship could be based on saying nothing at all and drinking whiskey together.

Surprisingly, Will found himself almost looking forward to the strange man's arrival. He didn't feel *off* anymore, just quietly there and grounding. Once in a while the strange oily substance would reach out on his behalf, slither beneath the sheets to move them, or over his face to correct a scar or mark that wasn't quite right. It hadn't lashed out at Will again.

To be fair, Will hadn't tested its potency to, since that first time.

The next time Cliff appeared, he seemed more tired. Will found him sitting on the porch steps looking out into the woods when he came home from a late night at the office. Thoughtlessly, in passing him, Will dropped a hand into his hair in an affectionate gesture.

He didn't realize that there had been no retaliation - from the man or his strange companion - until he was out the door again with two mugs in his hands.

More often than not, now, Cliff arrived dressed for war.

"What year do you come from?"

"Does it matter?"

"Do you know?"

Cliff's lips tilted just enough to suggest a smile and he shook his head, bringing the mug to his lips. Will had actually started buying tea, in case Cliff ever wanted it, but their tradition stood. For the first drink of the night, at least.

Will didn't question why Cliff always ended up in Wolf Trap. He didn't question why, if there was some strange portal from his world to Will's, nothing else came through with him. He didn't question because in all honesty he didn't care. What had started as a collection of another stray had long ago become something else.

This time, when Will sent the dogs to the living room and Cliff caught his wrist, he climbed into bed beside him to sleep. When he woke, as he expected, Cliff was gone.

And so it went, for a year, for a little over. Cliff would arrive, Will would meet him, they would sleep. Will wondered if the man left on his own accord or disappeared as involuntarily as he arrived; he was never awake to see. He'd tried to stay up, eyes half closed and on the back of the man sleeping beside him. But inevitably he would doze, and when he woke with a jerk he'd be in an empty bed.

One night he woke to soft sounds, just gentle things, no louder than one of his dogs yawning or a fly at the window, but these were aching, anguished noises. Whether in sleep or no, Cliff was crying, drawing in breaths in sharp hisses through his teeth as his shoulders trembled. For a while, Will just watched, still sleep-addled, and then he slid closer and rested a heavy arm over the man's middle, pressing his forehead between Cliff's shoulders.

Silence.

A beat, another.

And then Cliff allowed himself to cry a little more openly, and Will held him tighter. It could have been minutes, it could have been hours, neither spoke and neither made the other speak. They just pressed together, two men in a house in the middle of nowhere. Eventually, when the residual shaking left Cliff's form, he set a hand to Will's where it rested and slotted their fingers together with a sigh.

He was asleep not long after.

Will stayed awake.

Turned out Cliff disappeared, the oil sliding over his skin and uniform and hair, over Will, and out into the shadows where it faded to nothing. Will curled in on himself to keep the warmth there a little longer. In the morning he slept in.

Will knew what woke him.

He turned to his back and was met with a warm hand against his skin. He managed a sigh before lips met his own and pressed close. Will groaned, wrapping his arms around Cliff where he bent over him.

It had been six weeks and four days, and Will felt every single one of them.

“You’re here,” Will murmured, voice rough from sleep, and smiled as Cliff leaned into him again with a hum as his only answer.

It was too dark to see him, to see if he was still covered in grit and viscera, to see if the oil was leaking from his eyes like tears, leaving gold residue behind. Will shifted a little and felt the bed dip when Cliff knelt on it. He welcomed him into a sleepy embrace and tilted his chin back for the man to press tentative kisses to his throat.

Cliff lay heavy on him and sighed, tension leaving his body from sheer proximity. Will drew a hand down his back and felt that strange black substance gather beneath his fingers instead of clothes. He drew his hand back, stretching it taut, flexed his fingers and watched as one by one they were released. It was a little easier to see, now, moonlight filtering through the clouds that had covered it before.

Cliff was shirtless, his army fatigues and boots still on. His skin was clean. He smelled alive, and warm, and tired. Will turned his head against his hair and breathed him in.

“You can stay longer,” he told him quietly, feeling Cliff hum more than hearing him. When the other turned his head to look at Will properly his smile was warm.

“Perhaps.”

Will snorted but didn’t otherwise respond. He settled Cliff’s head against his chest again and just stroked his hair to ease the last of the tension from him. It was late, or early. It didn’t matter; he was here. For as long as he was able to stay this time. That was enough. After a while, Cliff shifted against him and turned to kiss his cheek.

“Tea?” He asked, and Will couldn’t help but laugh.

“Yeah.” he murmured, “I’ll get it.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Sometimes he arrived damaged, bleeding and sobbing and shaking in Will's arms, unable to even look at him until the black tar molded him back into himself. And then he would sigh, body heavy with the weight of everything in the world, and shuffle near enough to rest his head in Will's lap, relishing the feeling of his fingers in his hair.

He'd ask Will for tea.

They'd drink it in bed.

Sometimes, he arrived glorious.

But every time, he left.

Chapter Notes

So... not so much tentacle porn as oddly intimate lovemaking with tentacles present. Please forgive typos, I wrote this on my phone in the bath at 11:30 at night because the feels wouldn't go away.

The first time they made love, neither planned it.

It started as organically as any of their other intimacies; a stroke of fingers through sleep-bent hair, a whisper of a smile against a stubbled cheek. Will had nuzzled sleepy and warm beneath Cliff's chin and kissed just there, where his collarbones met, and found that what stroked his curls back from his forehead wasn't a human hand.

He'd seen more and more the physical manifestation of what Cliff called his 'wariness' as the entity accepted Will's place in Cliff's life.

And there was no other way to call it, really, but an entity. It was a thing with a mind of its own, part of Cliff's subconscious but only to a point. It responded to the baser human instincts: to warmth, to fear, to arousal. It obeyed only when it pleased.

And now, slipping slick and cool through Will's hair, it reached out on its own, Cliff watching as curiously as Will what it would do. It fell over Will like a wave of water, sticking to his

hair, his skin, before returning to its host and seeping into him once more. Will huffed a breath, met Cliff's eyes.

The other held his breath.

"You're beautiful," Will told him quietly, eyes flicking away again as the wave rose once more but this time split into individual limbs; six in all. Will laughed, eyes wide and unafraid as they all reached for him again, drawing over his cheek like war-worn knuckles, down his back like Cliff's desperate clinging caress.

Will turned to kiss him, humming, pleased, as familiar human hands tugged Will atop Cliff's form and held him close. Will let his legs spread around his hips and rocked down, a sigh of pleasure breaking their kiss for the moment it took to draw breath again.

The tentacles - there was no other word for them, either - tentatively explored the form their host so adored. Slipping beneath Will's clothes and spreading over them to devour them into the abyss, leaving Will bared and shivering against Cliff.

There was a strangeness to it that made Will feel almost giddy. It was the very definition of unreal, and yet the man beneath him was the most real thing in Will's life. The softest and kindest, the most understanding and open. When Cliff tugged Will's hair to arch his back and kiss bruises to his throat, Will went with a moan, pressing his hands to Cliff's chest to hold himself up.

Ostensibly, Cliff would arrive at nighttime. Will never once saw him during daylight hours, and in all honesty it didn't much matter. The fact that Will could see him was enough.

For a while, Will thought he was going mad. Strange oily substance and his partner's constant disappearing aside, Will *ached* for him when he was away. Will had never once ached for another person before, not in the folly of youth, not in cynical adulthood. He had just assumed he would rescue dogs and die alone, no harm no foul.

Then he'd met a stranger and fallen in love with his shadow.

The cruel irony of the matter was that he and Cliff had no way of communicating when he wasn't at Wolf Trap. There was no way to leave messages or pass any on, because Cliff had no idea where he kept coming from, and Will had scoured the FBI databases for a Clifford Unger only to come up empty.

He didn't exist on paper.

He didn't exist anywhere but with Will.

And that made the ache heavier, because at any moment he could stop existing there, too.

"God, more, touch me more," Will whispered, laughing when every part of Cliff complied.

His hands caught strong and secure at Will's hips, guiding them down with deliberate pressure, hard cocks rubbing together through Will's boxers and Cliff's pants. Cool limbs of black tickled down Will's back, disintegrated the barriers between their undulating forms.

Will spread his legs and one of Cliff's hands moved to press hot against the inside of his thigh, his other cupping Will's face as their kisses turned biting and needy.

"Anything," he promised, another chaste kiss to Will's lips before he smiled, almost feral, and released Will with his hands entirely.

A tentacle slithered to catch Will's hair and tug it, another coiled around his throat in a possessive, claiming way. Two more tickled behind his knees, two others wrapped around Will's middle in an embrace. Will was held suspended, just his hands against the strong chest beneath him, feeling his heart beat quick and sure, as Cliff lay back and watched.

"Fuck," Will breathed, biting his lip as a tentacle teased over his nipples and Cliff's eyes narrowed in pleasure. "That's hardly fair."

"Hardly," Cliff agreed, but didn't move to touch Will with his hands again, contented to allow himself - every other part of himself - to bring his partner to trembling, panting impatience.

Will's sensations were overwhelmed. Too many limbs touching everywhere that felt good; nipples and belly, the ticklish spot behind his ear Cliff nuzzled in his sleep, the insides of his thighs, higher still to curl around his balls and squeeze, just enough.

One teased between his cheeks and Will moaned, cock red and leaking up against his belly. He watched Cliff. He never took his eyes off him.

It was the strangest kind of erotic, like Will was pleasuring himself and being pleasured at the same time while Cliff watched, took in every shiver and gasp, let his eyes roam Will's body with barely contained hunger.

He caught Will's hand when he reached, slipped their fingers together, and tugged Will down against him again.

"Beautiful," Cliff told Will this time, and kissed away his arguments.

As quickly as they clung to Will, the cool oily limbs let him free and Cliff rolled them on the bed to pin Will beneath him.

He hated going away. It killed a small part of his soul every time he did.

Sometimes he arrived damaged, bleeding and sobbing and shaking in Will’s arms, unable to even look at him until the black tar molded him back into himself. And then he would sigh, body heavy with the weight of everything in the world, and shuffle near enough to rest his head in Will’s lap, relishing the feeling of his fingers in his hair.

He’d ask Will for tea.

They’d drink it in bed.

Sometimes, he arrived glorious.

But every time, he left.

Now he clung to Will and whispered promises both knew he couldn't keep. He caught a hand beneath Will's thigh as he drew his knees up around him and spread him open, kissing down Will's middle until he could fold Will's legs over his shoulders.

The first taste of him left Cliff breathless and starving. He clung to Will as he devoured him, wringing from him curses and whines and sobs of pleasure. He relished the cut of Will's nails over his scalp, the marks he would leave over his back, scrabbled in his desperation.

He kept the marks Will left on him when he disappeared. He kept them as long as he could.

"Fuck, Cliff, I'm gonna come," Will groaned, twisting his hand in Cliff's hair and tugging him away for a moment. "I want to come with you buried in me. Please -"

"Yes."

" *God* ."

Will dropped a hand across the bed, reaching for the bedside table and laughing helplessly when he couldn't. His fingers spread as he whined in displeasure, and Cliff sucked a bruise for Will to keep against his belly.

Will never did reach the second drawer.

He didn't have to.

A tentacle slid teasing and slick into Will's hole and pulsed itself thicker, pulling a curse from Will that bridged him off the bed.

"No, your hands -"

Cliff obliged, a finger sliding in alongside, groaning at the tightness, at the heat of Will around him. Then one finger became two, became three. The entity spread from Cliff's back like wings to drape adoring over Will's shaking form, caressing his hair from his forehead, drawing teasing over his lips until he parted them to kiss this part of Cliff as well.

It tasted like ozone, smelled like petrichor, and Will moaned before he turned his head aside, reaching for Cliff again.

The man surged up against him, sucking the taste of himself from Will's slack mouth as he pressed the thick head of his cock against Will's entrance.

Will clung to him, fingers fisted in Cliff's hair, dragging red marks down his side as their foreheads pressed together sweat-slippery and close.

"Don't let me go," Will breathed, lips just brushing Cliff's as he exhaled hard between them.

"Not for anything."

The pace Cliff set was slow, a deliberate and gentle exploration of Will's body. He kissed beneath his eyes when Will clamped them shut, the feeling overwhelming and wonderful. He

kissed Will's cheek, his jaw, the pulse hammering in his throat.

And all the while the blackness pulsed around them, converging into intricate patterns over Cliff's form, weaving a web, a net, that fell about them light as gossamer.

Will reached to tangle his fingers there instead, biting his lip on a helpless sound as Cliff found his prostate and thrust against him faster.

The ichor of Cliff's being held Will's hand.

Will fumbled to slip the fingers of his other with Cliff's.

It wasn't a conquest, nor a taking. For a time Will had assumed that if either felt the inclination towards sex, they would fuck, simple as that. It had taken over a year for their lips to meet. Had taken longer still for their hands to wander when they lay sleepy in bed together. He supposed it made sense that the first time their bodies joined it would be in lovemaking, and nothing less.

Cliff cupped Will's face and Will kissed his palm, breathless with pleasure as Cliff started to lose his careful rhythm and take his pleasure properly. Will drew up his knees, legs spread obscenely wide. He didn't care. He didn't fucking care, because Cliff was holding him so close, and so safe, and whispering his name as he tensed and shuddered within Will, filling him with unfamiliar and welcome heat. Will keened, his own cock neglected and leaking against his belly. He ducked his head when Cliff released it to stroke him instead, watching his capable hands bring Will closer and closer to his own release until he came with a sob, shaking with it, numbness tingling in his toes as he pressed them to the bed.

They lay trembling together, sweat-slick and messy, nuzzling because kissing was too much effort of coordination. Will still clung to the web Cliff had cast over them, finally allowing himself to look at it properly, to spread his fingers and see its design against his skin.

Coiled and sharp, like barbed wire, gently pulsing in time with Cliff's heart.

Will's own felt like it would burst.

He eased his legs to the bed with a groan as Cliff slipped out of him and rubbed his rough hand soothingly over Will's belly. After a while, Will turned, snuggling up against the familiar warmth of his furred chest. Cliff's fingers teased slow and lazy through Will's curls, untangling them from each other, letting them rest in half-ringlets around Will's face. His breathing slowed. His heartbeat followed.

Will was barely awake when he felt a hand tilt his chin up and went willingly, opening his mouth to Cliff and moaning low in pleasure.

"Don't go."

"Will."

"There has to be some way for you to stay with me," Will sighed, knowing it was useless. Pointless. They'd tried.

They'd failed.

"I'm sorry."

"Just come back to me," Will said quietly, stroking his knuckles over Cliff's cheek. "Come back."

"I will. Always." Cliff kissed him again, and Will knew that desperation, knew that tension, that panic that he could *taste* on Cliff's tongue and whined helplessly with it. "Always," Cliff repeated, stroking Will's hair behind his ear as he pressed their foreheads together.

Will could feel him fading, his legs no longer tangled with Will's, his hips no longer pressing close. Soon the weight of his arm would be gone and Will would be alone. And Cliff would be at war.

Again.

And again.

And again.

"Will," Cliff breathed, and Will couldn't feel his breath on his face. "I lo-"

Emptiness.

Silence.

A gust of wind beyond the window and the helpless sound Will always made when he reached and found the sheets cooling already. He wrapped himself in them, uncaring for the mess, and breathed in deep, keeping Cliff with him for just a moment more.

"I love you, too," he murmured.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> *It had occurred to Cliff that perhaps this was heaven. That perhaps instead of pearly gates and choirs of angels, heaven was a single house in the middle of nowhere with someone who loved him and waited for him. He'd noticed a pattern that heralded his arrival to Wolf Trap - he had to die. He had to die in order to slip into the oily womb of the universe and be deposited here for a time, a respite from the hell he lived in.*

Chapter Notes

> Possible spoilers but not really? Just musings and meanderings more than anything. For Hope, as always, but *especially* today.

Awake.

Cliff felt the familiar buoyancy of the web that held him and sighed, casting his eyes to the sky. He could see stars, which meant he wasn't in the trenches. Which meant he wasn't dripping blood and oil from his lips as he tried to drag his men out of harm's way.

It meant he'd died there and come up here.

To Wolf Trap, Virginia.

Year, unasked. Month, unimportant.

All that was important was that Will was here, and for however long he could have him, Cliff wouldn't leave his side.

He pitched forward, the barbs of the web catching his clothes and fading to black over them. He'd awoken in the small copse of trees near Will's home; he could see the lights on through the late night fog that was starting to gather. Behind him, the web shivered in the slight wind, its unnatural hum hidden by the leaves that hissed above it. Cliff didn't give it a second look. It would either fade and follow him or wait around and disintegrate when he did.

He'd tried to show it to Will once, the web, the strange thing that acted almost as an umbilical cord between his world and Will's, but it had always melted away from where Cliff had arrived, and he couldn't conjure it at will, like he could other things.

It didn’t matter.

It existed and didn’t just as much as Cliff himself in this world. Schrodinger’s man, Schrodinger’s web. Alive here and dead elsewhere at the same time, until someone opened the lid and pitched Cliff back into the trenches, and left the taste of Will Graham on his lips like a cruel carrot on a stick.

He paced through the grass, now, finding that cool, weightless place in his mind that allowed the Wariness within him to slide over his skin and make him clean again. No blood, no marks, no filth from another universe to track through Will’s house. Just Cliff. Exhausted, emaciated, aching.

The dogs heard him before Cliff even stepped up onto the porch, and Will was yanking the screen door open and slamming into him like a cannonball before Cliff could do more than tilt his hips enough to catch the banister and keep them both balanced as he held Will against him.

“How long?” Cliff asked him, nose in Will’s hair, a wide hand spreading against the back of Will’s head as he held him close and the other clung.

“Four months, eight days,” Will breathed, ear pressed to Cliff’s chest to listen to his heart beating, always so steady, always so slow. “Almost nine, it’s quarter to midnight. God I’ve missed you.”

“I’m here,” it was only as true as the length of time Cliff had here, but it was the most honest thing he could possibly say. For a long time they didn’t move, Will breathing against him, Cliff stroking a palm up and down Will’s back until his trembling eased and he sighed instead of gasping.

Will pulled back first, Cliff catching his chin between his fingers to lean in for a kiss that both smiled too hard into to properly take. It didn’t matter. Nothing mattered but the fact that they had this again, for however many seconds fate allowed this time.

“Tea?” Cliff breathed, and Will snorted, leaning in to nuzzle nose to nose before nodding and catching Cliff’s hand as he led him inside.

Nothing had changed. The dogs still clamoured around the newcomer, nosing into his pockets, nuzzling into his hands. There was still dust on the book case, still finger prints bright where Cliff had touched it on his way past - four months eight days ago.

Year, unasked. Month, unimportant.

Cliff knew - he had seen - that Will had tried to look for him. He’d flicked his eyes over the databases Will had to work with, very similar to those from back where Cliff had come. He wondered why he didn’t exist here, and then wondered why he was surprised.

He was certain Will Graham didn’t exist in his world, either. His heart just broke at the thought of finding that confirmed, so he’d never looked.

He stepped up behind Will as he watered down their whiskey, and wrapped his arms around Will's middle. A tentacle, black an lithe, slipped alongside Will's hand to take up one mug, another moved to gather the other, and Cliff nuzzled Will's temples as the man snorted and let them do the work, leaning his weight back against Cliff's chest, his head back against his shoulder.

"I forget how useful that shit is," Will mumbled.

"And kinky."

Will snorted again, turning in Cliff's embrace when the strange oily things set the microwave timer and slipped back into Cliff's form as though they never were. "No, I still maintain that's just you."

"They have a mind of their own," Cliff replied, feigning innocence. Will kissed him.

It had occurred to Cliff that perhaps this was heaven. That perhaps instead of pearly gates and choirs of angels, heaven was a single house in the middle of nowhere with someone who loved him and waited for him. He'd noticed a pattern that heralded his arrival to Wolf Trap - he had to die. He had to die in order to slip into the oily womb of the universe and be deposited here for a time, a respite from the hell he lived in.

Every time he returned home he had been resuscitated, choking back to consciousness in a LED-lit room or on a filthy stretcher in the medic tent. More and more, he wished they would stop trying. He had nothing left there anymore; just pain and anguish and mud.

The microwave beeped and Will didn't even reach for it, watching Cliff through half-open eyes and looking so, so satisfied. So the tentacles returned, freeing their drinks from the microwave, closing the door, stretching far beyond any human capacity to set both mugs to the scratched up dining table over the counter behind them.

"Want to know something stupid?" Will told him softly, fingers teasing at a loose string on Cliff's uniform shirt.

"Always."

"I was thinking about you," Will replied, a pleased half-smile showing a flash of teeth. "In bed, hand between my legs, just moments before you showed up on my doorstep."

Cliff purred a sound of contentment against him. "Were you?"

"I wonder if I can summon you with orgasms," Will mused, eyes wicked when they flicked up to meet Cliff's. "Should be a theory I test thoroughly, I think."

"Pity we can't test it together," Cliff told him, arms slipping to hold Will against his hips, pressing incrementally closer to him in a motion that felt almost unintentional if both their pleasure wasn't so obviously tenting the fabric of their trousers.

"Isn't it, though?" Will grinned, setting his hands to Cliff's chest as though to push him away before the man was on him; hungry mouth and tugging hands, one palm against Will's face as

his other hand worked free Will's belt and fumbled with the button on his jeans. Will, in turn, tore buttons instead of undoing them, slipping his fingers through familiar warm hair and curling them to tug, drawing another purred noise from Cliff.

"I need you to fuck me," Will told him, pushing up onto his toes to suck a bruise to Cliff's jaw. "Right the fuck now."

Cliff's lip snarled back and he gripped Will tighter, hands dropping to his hips to hoist him onto the counter before catching Will's wrists to pin them at his sides. Will showed his teeth in a wolf-smile back, and Cliff didn't think he had ever been more in love in his life.

Oily limbs replaced his hands around Will's wrists, and Cliff worked Will's cock free before sinking to his knees to take him into his throat. He held Will open, grasping his knees and not letting Will move an inch, teasing him until the other was cursing, laughing, hissing at him, and Cliff relished the bitterness of precome on his tongue as he pulled away.

Later, sipping their 'tea' at the table half-dressed, Will drew his tongue over kiss-bitten lips and regarded Cliff over the rim of his mug.

"Sorry about your shirt."

"No you're not."

Cliff rested his cheek against folded fingers and forced himself to stay awake. It was a cruelty he punished himself with deliberately; to have more time to see Will, to talk with him, to touch him. Sleeping against him was a pleasure indescribable but it felt like a waste, such a waste, when he didn't know when he'd see Will again.

"Leave it, I'll find the buttons and sew them back on for you."

Cliff blinked. "Will you?"

"Leave the shirt."

"What if I don't come back for it?"

"Shut up." Will's words were a whisper, and he blinked quickly before looking to the side. When he looked at Cliff again, his eyes were brighter.

"You sure you know how to sew?"

Will snorted, reaching to finish off the rest of his drink before pushing to stand. "Yes I do, prick. Come here."

Cliff went.

He shrugged out of his shirt and gave it to Will and watched him scrunch it into a bundle and set it to the table.

He followed Will as he led them to the bed and climbed in.

He set his hands to Will's face when he kissed him, and spread his legs when Will's fingers sought against him, spit-slick and eager.

He dropped his head back and knocked it against the headboard as Will made love to him, slow and deliberate and deep, until both were breathless.

He came to on a stretcher, nose filled with the reek of excrement and decay, the face of his medic hovering over him, smiling.

"We thought we'd lost you, sir," the man said.

He wished they had. He wished they hadn't even tried. He wished he could tell them.

Instead, with the taste of Will's lips still against his own, Cliff pressed his fingers to his eyes and wept.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!